

# Testimony – Benjamin Treat, Bangor Public Library

Second Regular Session, 132<sup>nd</sup> Maine Legislature  
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

*LD 2212 – “An Act Making Unified Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027.”*

February 20, 2026

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am providing testimony in support of the Maine State Library’s items in the Supplemental Budget, which appear on pages A-89 and A-90 of Part A of the budget proposal.

## **Introduction**

Thank you for considering the budget proposal which includes added support for expenditures from the Maine State Library general fund and the Statewide Library Information System Fund. The Bangor Public Library is one of the two largest public libraries in the state, and we serve as an Area Reference and Resource Center for the rural libraries in eastern and northern Maine. In this role, my staff see first-hand the value that the relevant state library positions and programs bring to rural Maine. These proposed changes come at a time when federal funding is uncertain.

The three branches of the federal government are clashing over the small percentage of federal expenditures that are sent to libraries, with Congress appropriating funds to the Institute for Museum and Library Studies (IMLS) while the Executive Branch calls for its elimination and the federal courts consider injunctions and lawsuits over that Executive Order. None of us can have any direct impact on that, and none among us knows the outcome. No one can accurately point to federal funds and say “Look, these positions can be funded by these federal funds.” It is only prudent for state government to look at the services that are essential to Maine libraries, Maine communities, and Maine residents, and preserve those no matter what happens at the federal level.

**Maine State Library general fund 0217: Page A-89 and A-90**

The proposed budget calls for two positions to be moved from federal funding to state funding: a section supervisor for circulation and talking books and a specialized services position responsible that supports the development of local library services around the state.

I'd first like to address the Library Section Supervisor., a position that is vital for multiple reasons. The state of Maine had the wisdom to organize the Maine State Library and to legislate the types of books that that library should focus on, such as books on legacy Maine industries like shipbuilding, forestry, and agriculture. Why would we not want to ensure that the library has the staffing it needs to actually circulate those materials to users and libraries around the state? More importantly, as the Director of Talking Books, the person in this position is responsible not only for making a specialized resource available to a large and vulnerable population of Maine residents and taxpayers, but also for eliminating the need for other libraries to duplicate this work. In a time when every possible efficiency must be salvaged, this is a program that provides an efficient service for a vital population, not only people with visual impairment, but also individuals with dyslexia and other learning differences.

The Library Specialized Services Position is vital for libraries across the state. The Maine State Library's library development staff are a phenomenal team of dedicated individuals who are support libraries as small as a room in a municipal building and as large as the Bangor Public Library. When you build a bridge, you don't just stretch boards across the gap and start marching across. The connections have to be supported with complex engineering, with struts and bracers and pylons that make the bridge usable. The library development team serve in that role for the public libraries of this state. If a library in Castle Rock has a problem, then they connect the person to a librarian in Derry who has already developed a program for it. If a Ms. Strout in Shirley Falls wants to resurrect the town library's teen program, library development can connect her with a Mr. Russo in Empire Falls who has done just that, but they can also draw on a wealth of their own expertise. Many of the problems of libraries aren't unique, but the network won't be in place without a team that connects libraries of all sizes and resource levels, drawing on their own experience and expertise, but also connecting the broader network for the benefit of all Maine's people.

**Statewide Library Information System Fund 0185: Page A-90**

The reallocation of the Maine InfoNet Executive Director salary is absolutely necessary to ensure the stability of Maine's academic, public, and school library computer systems. We have a phenomenal resource sharing network in Maine in the form of the MaineCat environment, an

interface that allows library patrons at hundreds of public, school, and academic libraries to quickly request materials from other libraries and have them sent at a moment's notice. At no additional cost to their town, a high school student in Millinocket can make just one click to request a book from the libraries at Bowdoin College. This power only exists because of the efficient, effective work of Maine InfoNet, tying together the complex, varied collection of computer networks that operate all sizes and types of Maine libraries. The staff of Maine InfoNet is small, but the resources they make available are enormous, and much of what makes libraries operate in our state will absolutely collapse if we do not ensure secure long-term funding for this position.

I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have and I appreciate the time you've taken to review and consider my testimony.

Respectfully,

Benjamin Treat

Director, Bangor Public Library